

THE RELATIONSHIP OF MUSIC TO ICE DANCING

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THE UNITED STATES FIGURE SKATING ASSOCIATION

Figure skating has been adequately analyzed in these Seminars, as well as in the numerous reference books such as the Evaluation of School Figures and the ISU Handbook, Part II.

Material For Use In

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JUDGES' SEMINARS

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Prepared By The

JUDGING STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Since judging ice dancing is a complex task and free skating, a judge must be knowledgeable on the timing, expressions, union, form, accuracy and placement of twenty different dances that make up the USFSA Dance Test Structure. It certainly would not be practical to attempt to analyze all of these categories in these seminars since time would not permit.

However, we wish to discuss that particular element which is so essential to the performance of the various categories used to judge ice dancing, -Music.

Next to having ice and skates, music unquestionably is the most important single accessory for the complete enjoyment of ice skating. In fact, it can be said further, "The proper type of music played at the correct tempo is necessary and essential for the complete enjoyment and pleasure of ice dancing." In judging ice dance tests and dance competitions, not only must the judges be able to evaluate the technique and execution of the performance of the dancers, but they must have a

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working knowledge and understanding of music as it is related to the various dances.

In this discussion an attempt will be made to illustrate and to emphasize the simple elements of music and apply them to ice dancing.

The present marking system for ice dance tests, introduced in the 1963 USFSA

Rulebook, divides all dance tests into two categories: - Dance Rhythm and Execution.

Dance Rhythm includes Timing, Expression and Unison while Execution includes

Form, Accuracy and Placement. In the study of the Relationship of Music to Ice

Dancing we will be concerned only with Dance Rhythm. In further defining Dance

Rhythm, we find that:-

Timing:- is the proper relationship of the stroke of the skate and movements of the body to the correct beat of the music.

Expression:- is that quality of dancing interpreting the character of the music which designates the type of dance; i.e., waltz, tango, fox trot, march, etc.

Unison:- is the ability of the dancers (partners) to execute and to express the dance with similar and pleasing movements and actions to the proper beat of the music.

Since the Dance Rhythm category represents fifty percent (50%) of the total mark of any dance test and the skater is judged according to his or her ability to dance with and to the music, it would seem reasonable enough to expect dance judges to have a working knowledge of musical elements to evaluate dance tests.

We will now listen to an experimental tape recording prepared by the Canadian Figure Skating Association.

Now there is nothing which insists that the musical count and the skating count must be exactly the same. We choose the Blues for our first example because this is one of the few dances where they are the same. This is also true for some but not all Tango and one or two other dances. Surprising as it may be to some of you, this is not true with the ordinary Foxtrot.

COMMENTARY ON TAPE

This is an experimental tape recording which has been produced by the Dance Committee of the Canadian Figure Skating Association with the assistance of three professional musicians. Its purpose is to describe and illustrate a few of the rhythms which are used in our standard compulsory dances and to show how they are related to the various steps in these dances.

Nearly everyone can recognize the beat in music, but what is more important for both the musician and skater is to be able to recognize the different qualities of the different beats. For an example, let us listen to some music and for reasons which will become apparent a little later, we shall choose a Blues. After the introduction we shall indicate the beat with a drum. **BLUES MUSIC.**

Although intentionally not emphasized with the drum, note that some beats feel a little stronger than others, this is what is called the strong beat. It is the first beat of the four count musical bar or measure, this is really the most basic musical rhythm. Musicians consider the full period of one measure as a whole note with four beats to the measure, each one is therefore called a quarter note. The time signature which gives the musical count is, therefore, for this music called four quarter time or simple four-four time. The first number is the number of beats to the bar, the second number which is written underneath it like a fraction gives the value of each note that is counted.

We shall listen to the same music again, this time counting the beats. **BLUES MUSIC.** We shall repeat this twice more only counting on the wrong beat to show the difference. **BLUES MUSIC-count started on 2nd beat.** **BLUES MUSIC-count started on 3rd beat.** Nearly everyone will recognize that the former of these is wrong, but a lot of people seem to feel that the latter is correct; this is not the case. The skating diagram for the Blues shows the count 1-2-3-4 beside the steps. It is very important that this count coincide exactly with the musical count 1-2-3-4. Anything else is in error even though the skater may keep accurately in time. If the skating count 1 coincides with the musical count 2 or 4, then this is a very serious error and it shows that the dancer has no ear for music whatever. If the skating count 1 coincides with the musical count 3, sometimes called the "weak beat"; then this is a less serious error but is wrong never the less. Whether or not it is a failing error will depend on the rhythm structure of that particular dance, the test level of the dance and, of course, how well the rest of the dance is performed. In some instances, skating on the so-called "weak beat" is a major, inexcusable error. At other times, it is immaterial. We say the so-called "weak beat," as we shall soon see that what some people erroneously call the "weak beat" is not musically a weak beat at all. This is what has caused so much of the controversy and confusion in the past.

Now there is nothing which insists that the musical count and the skating count must be exactly the same. We choose the Blues for our first example because this is one of the few dances where they are the same. This is also true for some but not all Tangos and one or two other dances. Surprising as it may be to some of you, this is not true with the ordinary Foxtrot.

We shall listen to a few bars of a Foxtrot as used for the Ten-Fox. After the introduction, we shall count four bars using the skating count of four beats to the bar, and then count four bars the way a musician would count them with two beats to the bar. FOXTROT MUSIC-skating count. FOXTROT MUSIC-music count.

We shall now spend a few minutes with the Waltzes. Waltz music is characterized by musical beats in groups of three called three quarter time. DRUM BEATS then WALTZ MUSIC using the same beats.

The European Waltz is composed entirely of three beat edges, and it should go without saying that each edge must occupy one bar of music with the skater always skating on the strong beat. If a skater steps down consistently on count 2 or 3, this shows a complete lack of understanding of music and it is unquestionably a failure. All of our other skating Waltzes to some extent, but most especially the Dutch, the American and Three Lobe are based on a six count unit which is equivalent to two bars of music. The skater must step on a strong beat of course, and while the skater counts 1-2-3-4-5-6, the musician counts 1-2-3-1-2-3.

Now, every bar in a Waltz starts with a strong beat; contrary to what many people have tried to say in the past. The big question confronting us now though is- Does it matter which strong beat the skater uses for step 1? Or, is there indeed any difference between strong beats anyway? This brings us to a very important musical concept known as phrasing. Now in a Free Dance, there should be an exact correspondence between the skating beats and the music beats for the entire dance. In this case, the music is chosen first, or at least, it should be chosen first, and the steps are designed to interpret this particular musical selection and arrangement. In the compulsory dances the sequence is repeated and the step numbering is largely arbitrary. A person seeing a new dance for the first time, and not seeing the introductory steps cannot, in general, tell which is step number 1; but there may be several, equally good, arbitrary choices for the step that will be called number 1 in the Rulebook. Anyone of these could satisfactorily be used at the start of a musical phrase.

Now, a "phrase" is defined in the Harvard Dictionary of Music as: "a natural division of the melodic line, comparable to a sentence of speech. In music of the classical period, a phrase usually includes, according to the tempo, 2, 4, or 8 measures." All of our dance music, probably without exception, has this sort of structure.

We shall illustrate this with our Waltz. First, we shall indicate the first beat of every bar. WALTZ MUSIC. Next, we shall indicate only the strong beat which begins a two bar phrase. This is the beat you must use to start each edge in an American Waltz or the six beat sequence in the Dutch Waltz. WALTZ MUSIC. Now we shall identify the intermediate strong beats so that you can hear the difference. WALTZ MUSIC-drum starts on 4th beat. It would be wrong for a skater to use this beat to start a six count edge or sequence of steps. This has often been erroneously called "skating on the weak beat," but, as we have seen, we are still skating on A strong beat, but it is the wrong strong beat. The skating phrases and the musical phrases do not coincide. This is called skating "out of phase" with the music. To carry the example one step further, we shall indicate the start of the

four bar phrases. WALTZ MUSIC.

The next musical rhythm we shall consider is the March. While people often glibly talk about 4/4 Marches, this kind is relatively uncommon and not at all suitable for our skating dances. We shall play an example of this a little later on so you can tell the difference.

Here is a 2/4 March with the strong beat of each bar accented by our drum. MARCH MUSIC. Exactly the same as with the Waltz, we have two bar phrases and, in this case, we have four skating counts to the two bar phrase. DRUMS. MARCH MUSIC--using drums. It is important that the skating count number 1 be the first strong beat in this phrase and not the second. We shall play our tune again accenting the second strong beat in each phrase. MARCH MUSIC. This is incorrect and should be carefully avoided.

The 6/8 March is a little different. It has a much more rollicking and lilted rhythm and is preferred by many skaters for the Fourteenstep. Here is an example of 6/8 rhythm. DRUMS then MUSIC. Here too, the phrasing is extremely important and you must not start your four count rolls on the wrong strong beat. It should be noted that this rhythm is acceptable for the Fourteenstep, but it is no longer permitted for the Kilian or Quickstep.

Well, we promised to let you hear a true 4/4 March. Here is a portion of the well known march from Wagner's "Tannhauser," which is a typical example. MARCH MUSIC. I think I can say, without fear of contradiction, that this is hardly suitable for the Fourteenstep.

Our next dance, the Paso Doble, is a Spanish March and is usually written in 2/4 time just like our regular marches. The rhythm is unmistakable. STICKS HITTING WOOD BLOCK-1-2-1-2-1-2. Here is the skating count, again in two bar phrases. STICKS HITTING WOOD BLOCK-1-2-3-4-1-2-3-4. "Espana Cani" is probably the most famous Paso Doble and we shall listen to it now. Listen carefully to the rhythm in the introduction. CASTANETS then PASO DOBLE MUSIC. Although not suitable for our particular ice dance, there are also 3/4 Paso Dobles. "Lady of Spain" is perhaps the best known of this group. The similarity of the rhythm is clearly seen. PASO DOBLE MUSIC.

Finally, we come to the Quickstep. This is really a fast Foxtrot played essentially in the 2/4 March time. Just about everything we said a few minutes ago about these 2/4 Marches also applies to the Quickstep. "If You Knew Susie" is the tune that the inventor of this dance, the late Reg Wilkie, had in mind. It is an excellent example of the rhythm we are looking for. So here it is ! QUICKSTEP MUSIC.

We hope that you have enjoyed our presentation and that you have a little better understanding of musical rhythms than you did twenty minutes ago. Your announcer has been Wilf Langevin.

The following has been prepared in addition to the tape you have just heard.

The last rhythm to be discussed is the Tango. This ballroom dance had its beginning in South America at the turn of the century. Tango music is very suitable for all ice tangos. This music has a slinky mood and has a definite flavor of its own. In the Tango there are two definite rhythms; that of the Spanish Tango and that of the Argentine Tango.

In the Spanish Tango the rhythm is in phrases of two measures. In the first measure the first beat is accented and is sustained an extra half beat and the last half beat is lightly accented. In the second measure of the phrase the first beat is accented and the second beat is lightly accented. Here is an example. First the music count, followed by the skating count. SPANISH TANGO MUSIC--music count -1-2 and 1-2, 1-2 and 1-2. SPANISH TANGO MUSIC--skating count-1-2 and 3-4, 1-2 and 3-4.

The Argentine Tango also has two measure rhythm phrasing. In the first measure the beats are of equal duration with both being equally accented. In the second measure the first beat is accented but the second beat is divided into two beats, each held the duration of the first. Here is an example. First the music count, followed by the skating count. ARGENTINE TANGO MUSIC--music count-1-2-1-2 and, 1-2-1-2 and. ARGENTINE TANGO MUSIC--skating count-1-2-3-4 and, 1-2-3-4 and, 1-2-3-4 and.

1 2 3 4 5 number of beats in each bar

2 4 4 4 8 the value of each note that is counted

Also note that $\frac{4}{4}$ is usually written as C and $\frac{3}{4}$ is usually written as C.

Here are the examples given in the tape:

BLUES 

Musical count 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Skating count 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

FOXTROT 

Musical count 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Skating count 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

(Note that foxtrots are not, strictly speaking, written in $\frac{4}{4}$ time.)

WALTZ 

Musical count 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

Skating count 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

(European Waltz)

Skating count 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6

(all our others)

MUSICAL RHYTHMS IN THE COMPULSORY DANCES

An experimental tape recording prepared by the Canadian Figure Skating Association.

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This tape has been prepared particularly for use in judging schools as part of an educational program for our judges, prospective judges, and other skaters. Most of the rhythms used in the compulsory dances are demonstrated.

The most important point which is emphasized in this tape is that the musical count and the skating count do not have to be always exactly the same, although there is always a definite relationship between them. This approach to the music problem has generally not been realized. As a direct result of this, the question of 'strong' beat and 'weak' beat has finally been resolved.

Explanation of "time signature": This tells the musician how to count the music. The commonest time signatures used in ice dancing are these:

2	2	3	4	6	number of beats in each bar
2	4	4	4	8	the value of each note that is counted

Also note that $\frac{4}{4}$ is usually written as C and $\frac{2}{2}$ is usually written as C.

Here are the examples given in the tape:

BLUES C 

Musical count 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Skating count 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

FOXTROT C 

Musical count 1 2 1 2

Skating count 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

(Note that foxtrots are not, strictly speaking, written in $\frac{4}{4}$ time,)

WALTZ $\frac{3}{4}$ 

Musical count 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

Skating count 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

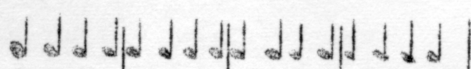
(European Waltz)

Skating count 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6

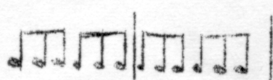
(all our others)

MARCH (1) $\frac{2}{4}$ 


Musical count 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2
 Skating count 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

MARCH (2) $\frac{C}{4}$ 

Musical count 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2
 Skating count 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

MARCH (3) $\frac{6}{8}$ 

Musical count 1 2 1 2
 Skating count 1 2 3 4

MARCH (4) $\frac{C}{4}$ 

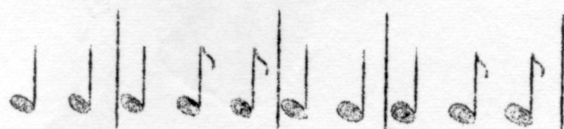
Musical count 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4
 Skating count (not generally used for skating)

PASO DOBLE and QUICKSTEP are essentially the same as MARCH $\frac{2}{4}$ as far as the count is concerned, but they are often written as C. $\frac{4}{4}$

TANGO RHYTHMS IN THE COMPULSORY DANCES

TANGO (Spanish) $\frac{2}{4}$ 

Musical Count 1 2 & 1 2 1 2 & 1 2
 Skating count 1 2 & 3 4 1 2 & 3 4

TANGO (Argentine) $\frac{2}{4}$ 

Musical Count 1 2 1 2 & 1 2 1 2 &
 Skating Count 1 2 3 4 & 1 2 3 4 &

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CGSA Dance Committee